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THE NATURE AND USES OF ELOQUENCE.

AN

ORATION,

PRONOUNCED BEFORE THE

PHILORHETORIAN SOCIETY,

OF THE

WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY,

August 25th, 1835.

BY REV. JOHN DEMPSTER.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE SOCIETY.

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1835.

THE Committee of the Society, having delayed publishing the Oration, for some weeks, in expectation of receiving a copy of the Poem, delivered on the same occasion, now apologize to the Society and its friends, for this delay; and regret that circumstances have prevented the reception of the copy, in season for publication with the Oration.

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ORATION.

PERCEIVING before me an Assembly, the most of whom might instruct the Speaker, I would dare to challenge your attention, for a few moments, only on the ground that my theme is important.

This bright array of talent and literature, of mental and moral excellence, imposes on the Speaker, higher obligations, as it consists of blooming youth, and honorable age—of those who look to be led nearer the acme of human attainments, and of those who demand our accordance in the great principles, with which they are familiar.

The infant, but far-famed Institution with which you are connected, demands the attention of such minds, so cultivated ; for in this great republic, thousands are looking to the Wesleyan University, as to a radiant point, from which should diverge, in all directions, the rays of deep literature and correct philosophy. Nor does the object that unites the Society, which I particularly address, claim too much, when it calls into requisition, the highest powers that grace the Assembly. This object, consisting in that wondrous art, by which one mind is made to animate a thousand—by which one individual melts and moulds the spell-bound throng that hear him, into his own manner of conceiving, and purposes of acting.

This art, which is called Eloquence, has been cultivated by the most highly endowed minds, of which the history of our race speaks. It has achieved deeds, at which the world wondered, and by which the destinies of nations were swayed. This art received more attention, and wrought greater feats, when Greece was young and vigorous, and when Rome was powerful and classic, than during the long chain of ages that have succeeded those illustrious periods.

And though a land of *Liberty* furnishes the only soil in which Eloquence can bud and bloom, it has never received an attention in the New World, proportioned to the measureless sway it is capable of exerting. In our times, it seems to be too generally assumed, that a speaker becomes eloquent, as a season becomes fruitful, depending neither on the goodness of the seed deposited, nor on the skill and diligence of the cultivator ; but on hidden causes entirely within the control of mysterious power. Or on the other hand, the most arduous labor has been bestowed to furnish qualifications which nature alone can give ; while those attainments, which the most protracted life is not too long to make, have been expected to flow, unsought, from the hand of nature.

Now, that something may be contributed toward rightly directing efforts to accomplish this great object, permit me to glance at what belongs to *nature*, and what to *art*, in *furnishing an Orator*.

When I affirm, that the intonations of the voice, and the gesticulations of the speaker, depend on art only to correct what is wrong, I merely repeat what has often been insisted on, by the greatest masters of rhetoric.

If he speaks the most eloquently, who speaks the most naturally, then whatever makes his manner less natural, makes the Orator less eloquent. Nature, then, so far as manner is concerned, furnishes the only correct standard of eloquence ; whatever, therefore, adds to simple nature, or diminishes its powers, derogates from the standard of good speaking. Every attempt to improve nature, embarrasses her ; for if it be not entirely useless, because utterly inefficient, it must be positively injurious.

Is it then demanded, why the prince of Grecian Orators deemed himself unfit for the forum, until he had passed the mirror and sea-side training ? Why the master-spirits of every age have insisted on the most rigid discipline for the future orator ? The only correct answer is, that Demosthenes, in all this training, aimed not at improving nature, but at disenthralling her—not to make his gesticulations artificial, or less natural, but more accordant with nature—not to rise above nature, but to free her from that awkwardness induced by early embarrassment—not to teach his voice when to rise, and when to fall, but to give it strength and clearness, by vigorous exercise. Indeed,

the only legitimate object of all such training, is not to acquire what is right, but to remove what is wrong.

But who, among all the thousands destined to act as public speakers, have neither contracted unnatural habits, nor are yet in danger of contracting them? Here then, is an imperious demand for rigid rules and skilful teachers.

Newton found it more difficult to unlearn the world, what it had erroneously believed for a thousand years, than to learn it his vast system of truth, which is supported by the loftiest mathematical demonstration. And if we require rules and instructors, in those branches which aim at improving native powers, much more do we need them, where error threatens to embarrass these powers, and to unlearn that into which we have unfortunately blundered.

Indeed, if we inquire after the greatest obstacle, with which the teacher of this art is called to contend, we are referred to his task of unlearning the future orator, what he should never have learned.

But when the pupil has been prevented from falling into error, or when his acquired awkwardness has been removed, he has received from his instructor all that human skill can bestow. He might be furnished with a set of rules, with a view to assist nature—rules by which he should extend his arm, raise his voice, and place the emphasis; but if the corresponding feeling of his nature prompt not these, in vain are they performed mechanically; and if these feelings do prompt them, he can need no other prompter. Should a speaker turn his attention to the modulations of his voice, and to the motions of his hands, the feelings indispensable to proper tones and action, will assuredly be wanting. For if the mind can attend to but to one object at the same moment, and if it can feel no excitement from that to which it pays no attention, then while it is intent on the *manner* of communicating, it can catch no inspiration from the matter communicated. And if the speaker's attention be divided between the manner and matter, the excitement his mind should feel from the latter, will, of course, be diminished in exact proportion as it attends to the former.

Whatever degree of attention, therefore, is given to the manner, while speaking, just so much diminishes the excitement indispensable to a proper manner.

Nature, in the work that is entirely her own, scorns all the intermed-

dling of art. As well may may we prescribe rules by which the sorrowing widow shall weep, as to fix those by which the orator shall be eloquent. In this work, nature must be left alone, free and unfettered as the circumambient air we breathe; then will the thoughts that glow, the genius that flashes, brighten and vivify all her exterior powers.

But though to correct what is wrong, is all that art can do as to the management of the voice, and the action of the speaker, it can do much more in furnishing his other qualifications.

He must have at his command LANGUAGE, and language was never the gift of nature. Nature undoubtedly has her signs by which her strong emotions may be unequivocally expressed. The motion of the hand, the tone of the voice, the look of the eye, the features of the face, and the very limbs of the body, may all be eloquent of the struggling emotions within. These are the appropriate media through which heart communes with heart; but the most mighty and admirable instrument, by which mind converses with mind—by which intellect acts on intellect, is *Language*. The very constitution of human society evidently demanded this instrument. Without it, the loftiest purposes of being must have remained unaccomplished. But though language did not originate in nature, though it was contrived by human genius, or given by a miracle from Heaven, nature has evidently adopted it and made it her own. Did it not corruscate with the scintillations emitted by nature, it could never be that wonder-working instrument, by which the bosoms of a thousand listeners are made to glow. Did not the ardent mind of the speaker embody itself in the words which he utters, they could never possess that magic power by which they have so often acted on minds of every habit, and of every capacity.

It is this dependence which the efficacy of language has on the inspiration of the mind, together with the sympathy which mind has with mind, through the appropriate medium, that gives one word in a sentence more power than any other of all the thousands that compose a language. Other words there may be, of nearly the same import, but just so much as their force and meaning differ from the right one, will they fail to carry the entire view of the speaker, to the soul of the hearer. Nor is there a less powerful charm in the right members of a sentence, than in the words of which it is composed.

It is familiar to good taste, that so entirely may a sentence be finished, as that the smallest change in any of its members, would mar the beauty of its symmetry, and break the enchantment with which it acts. The same thing is equally true, and more important, with respect to a whole discourse. Where an entire discourse is made to consist of one chain into which the sentences that compose it, naturally connect themselves, it is known to act on the rational faculties with a power, no less captivating, than that with which a well formed sentence acts on cultivated taste.

To use language with merely grammatical correctness, can give the speaker no claims to the orator's lofty prerogative. He must use it with enchanting sweetness, and with resistless force. He must use it so as to convince, persuade, and overpower—with perspicuity, with energy, and with elegance.

As then, language is the magic wand, the unparalleled *instrument*, by which the orator achieves all that is splendid in his art, what labor is too Herculean to acquire its richest treasures? In vain may he hope to acquire them without labor; for a mind not extensively acquainted with language, not imbued with its living spirit, and enriched with its highest attributes, can never select its best terms and combine them in the most forcible manner, during the arduous labor of public address, amidst the flashes of genius, and the goings forth of daring thought.

But to make the highest philological attainments, is far from completing the qualifications of a speaker. These furnish the channel of communication, but not the matter to be communicated. To that versatility of mind, so important to an orator, a knowledge of nature through the various sciences, is indispensable.

He is to accomplish three great purposes, by becoming a man of science. He acquires materials for illustration, a knowledge of the various subjects he may be called to treat, and a vigor and expansion of his mental powers.

He should be a man of science, that from its vast store-house he may draw materials for the purposes of illustration. Addressing men of every art and of every science, he should be able to avail himself of all the facts and truths which they furnish the literary world.—That in which a man is deeply interested, and with which he is most

familiar, is to him the most striking illustration of whatever may be inculcated. Hence, from the business followed, and the objects pursued, by the various ranks of men, the orator should be qualified to collect materials for illustration, and so lay under contribution, to his great purpose, every object within the grasp of his thoughts, and the compass of his research. He should be able to draw his comparisons, and borrow his imagery from the deepest wonders of art, and the grandest scenes of nature—from the darkest chambers of mind, and the loftiest mount of science. Not only should he be able to arm himself with the materials for comparison and imagery, and for description, furnished by the newly-created substances of chemistry, the wondrous laws of hydraulics, the mysterious operations of magnetism, the wonder-working electric fluid, and all the arts that compel material nature to execute human purposes; but he should be able to press into his service, the spirit of the whirlwind, and the torrent of the lightning; the growl of the ocean, and the thunder of the heavens; the bloom of the rose, and the beams of the morning, together with the deep feelings of kindred spirits, and the bright flashes of lofty minds. When he has explored this broad field, in which mind was never capable of satiety, there await his bidding, figures of every form, and flowers of every hue.

The orator should also have a knowledge of science, because it is indispensable to qualify him for the subject on which he may be called to speak. Without knowledge commensurate to his subject, his wit might sparkle, his fancy paint, and his genius flash, but his arguments might never be invincible. How, for example, as a Statesman, can he intelligently speak concerning a proposed improvement of a hydraulic, pneumatic, or geological character, without some scientific attainments? How, as a Physician, on the causes and cures of diseases, without knowing the structure of the human frame, and the chemical properties of the proposed remedy? How, as a Lawyer, without some acquaintance with the principles of those arts which the various causes he pleads may involve? Or how, as a Preacher, without some comprehensive view of the natural sciences, to which the Book he explains so constantly alludes?

But his mind should be fraught with scientific knowledge, especially

because he needs the vigor and expansion obtained by acquiring such knowledge. The mental, like the corporeal powers, become vigorous in proportion as they are exercised. And, assuredly, we can need no new argument, to prove that mental vigor, consisting in acuteness of perception, fixedness of attention, tenacity of memory, and vivacity of imagination, is to the orator an indispensable qualification, if he would be lastingly successful. Now, though mental vigor is nature's gift, its improvement is the fruit of making large scientific acquirements ; for the arduous exercise of the mind, and the increasing strength of its powers, are well known to stand in the order of cause and effect.

And what intellectual labor could so thoroughly discipline the mind, as the acquiring of those sciences which require habits of the closest attention, and of strictly consecutive thought.

Mathematics, for instance, that intellectual cathartic, cannot fail to impart mental health and vigor. What mind can trace its endless golden chain, link by link, from almost nothing, out to infinity, and not learn to think in higher style?

Held in communion with these pure and immutable truths, the mind loses its imbecility, and ascends to empire, over the dominion of nature. And having acquired an acuteness, which this most perfect of the sciences alone could render, the mind is prepared to be amplified, by ascending to the regions of Astronomy. There, it accustoms itself to make worlds and systems, the play-ground of its thoughts—to take in, not only those bodies which Creative Power has stationed around the sun, but through our far-looking instruments, to wander over the very outskirts of Jehovah's dominion—to make four hundred millions of worlds, the field it explores. A mind thus employed, cannot but grasp in its enlarged embrace, the *totality* of the subject which it may discuss. Now, what is affirmed of the improving influence of these two branches of science, on the mind, is no less true of the tendency of all other branches. For not only will our acquaintance with the beauty, order, and harmony of nature, be more accurate and extensive, as the range of our knowledge becomes broader, but the grasp of our intellectual powers will be proportionally strengthened.

All the phenomena of mind, and matter, are doubtless referable to

a few general principles; for, as our knowledge of nature has enlarged, the number of principles, under which we class its operations, has diminished, and the same result may be expected through all the progress of human knowledge, up to the utmost limit it is destined to reach.

Hence, by following nature into all her penetrable secrets, that mental power by which we generalize, is signally improved—that intellectual command, by which objects apparently various, are ordered into one class, under the same principle, is much extended.

And how important to the orator, is the power, rapidly to classify—to trace particular truths to general truths—single acts, and feelings, to a broad and pervading principle, no elevated order of talent can be needful to show.

For every additional principle, on which science rests, with which the orator becomes acquainted, while it is another key to admit him to new intellectual treasures, and a magic power, by which another feature in the face of the Universe is unveiled to him, is also a new accession of mental energy. And, indeed, the mind deeply acquainted with all these great principles, becomes itself the place, within the limits of which, the Universe lies—a place, in which revolve, in miniature, all the ages of time—a place, in which are witnessed in epitome, all the past and future operations of nature.—Now, it is this comprehensive grasp of nature, which elevates intellect above the fogs of sense and passion, to that towering summit, ever bright with the eternal splendor of reason.

And who so much needs the intellect, stored with these treasures of invaluable knowledge; who so much needs the imagination replenished with splendid imagery, and all the various accomplishments, with which profound study can enrich the mind, as he who is to melt and mould the mingled throng into his own peculiar mood?

The orator must also know the philosophy of mind, for it is with mind he has chiefly to do.

Unless he knows the powers with which it is gifted, and the laws by which it is governed, how can he apply to it that mental, or moral force, indispensable to move it favorably toward his ruling object? How can he move the mental energies in a given direction, when he knows not the spring to be touched, which communicates such motion? He must then familiarize himself with the nature of mind—

with its susceptibilities, its passions, and its propensities—with its powers to think, and its desires to act. Not that he can withdraw that covering with which the Creator has veiled the essence of mind, or analyze that thought-producing principle, which likens us to Him —not that he can trace it in every step of its viewless process, or even determine the manner in which it commences many of its operations. We know not that this sagacity belongs to any created intellect. But he may acquaint himself with the original susceptibilities of the mind, with the laws of its associations, and with the motives by which, in its various states, it may be most easily influenced.

And as the history of our race, is the philosophy of our nature, it is a medium through which the phenomena of mind should be steadily contemplated. It unfolds the powers, marks the propensities, and carries us back to the susceptibilities of the human being.—Leading us up the stream of time, through all the ages the Sun has measured out, it developes human character under all the millions of varied circumstances, in which the multitudes of our race have been placed. It records not only those renowned achievements, which have filled the world with the actors' names; but it nicely traces those hidden causes which have acted differently on various minds. It admits us to the councils of kings, the intrigues of courts, and to those untold motives, which acts themselves only could reveal. It displays human nature under the empire of vice, under the control of virtue—in the absence of strong temptations, and under the excitement of powerful motives. So that an accurate acquaintance with history, is a profound knowledge of mind. This is especially so, when he who studies it, reads with equal care, the mystic page of his own bosom. For in himself, every man may find, in embryo, most qualities of mind, that have ever been displayed by our race, since it first entered an existence.

And when these two immense volumes are studied together—where thought is made the subject of thought, desire a matter of scrutiny, and passion the object of rigid analysis, and when this theatre on which the mental man is surveyed, becomes enlarged into the field of universal history, a knowledge of mind is acquired, which reaches to the utmost attainable limit.

Now, just in proportion as this knowledge is acquired by the orator,

will be his power to perceive the most direct avenue to his auditors' hearts. Knowing what human nature is, he will address men in the character they really sustain ; not as though they were all matter or all mind ; not as if they should act entirely for the present world or wholly for the next ; not as if each were a solitary being, or lived wholly for society : but as possessing a compound nature which partakes both of the earth-born animal and heavenly cherub—as providing for two allotments of being—the mixed state of time, and the changeless relations of Eternity,—As capable of excitement by two classes of motives—such as are found in self-interest and those urged by the mighty voice of conscience. With this comprehensive knowledge of the capabilities, propensities, and destinies of men will he perceive, at a glance, the side on which they lie most open to conviction and persuasion ; and thus act on those great principles by which human nature, in every variety of condition, may be easily approached, and powerfully swayed.

But if the orator would be eloquent, he must be virtuous.

For all his mightiest appeals are to those strong principles, which expire in human nature the moment virtue is lost. And as these principles can only be appealed to with success, by him in whose own bosom they powerfully operate, when they cease to predominate there, he ceases to excite them any where else. Thus if the man who is niggardly, would induce others to act generously, he must himself first feel the transforming thrill of noble sentiment. If he who is obdurate, would touch the hearts of his auditors, by a picture of wo, his own must first be melted to pity by the miseries he describes. If the pretending lover of his country, would rouse it to some great deed, by motives of patriotism, his own selfish heart must first catch the Spartan flame. And if the hypocrite in religion, would prompt others to ardent devotions, he must first deceive himself into the persuasion, that he believes the sentiments he utters.

Though it cannot be questioned, whether a few gifted individuals may not counterfeit the genuine feeling of a glowing heart, while that feeling remains a stranger to the speaker's bosom ; yet these instances are so few, and the requisite effort to succeed in them, so arduous, that they can only be viewed as exceptions to the general rule.

That to feel *deeply*, is an indispensable qualification to speak *for-*

cibly, all classes of men seem perfectly aware. The tragedian felt this, when he carried the corpse of his much loved child from its grave to the theatre, that he might better act his part in a touching tragedy. The most illiterate feel this; for with such accuracy do they distinguish, in a speaker, between fictitious and real feeling, that it is scarcely possible to impose on them the counterfeit, for the genuine.

If then, an orator can speak eloquently, only when he speaks sincerely—only when the strong feelings of his bosom imbue the living words he utters—only when he possesses those elevated moral principles, to which he makes his overpowering appeals, how arduous should be his effort for the elements of virtue, pure as the Eternal light has penciled it in the living oracles.

Now, the two positions, that much is to be done for our race, in this age, and that Eloquence is one appointed instrument to accompli sh it furnish the most overpowering motives to make these high mental and moral attainments.

If we have burst into existence, at the very period when the approaching crisis, to which the nations of the earth must come, is at the door—at an age that shall flame with grander events, than those which emblazon any period on the records of time—at a period when the social system is about to be re-modeled, and the moral world regenerated ; if such be the moment in which we exist, and act, then is our responsibility of character equally high. That such is the fact, indications that cannot be mistaken, gather thick and fast around us. The public agitation, which has recently been effected, by questions of immeasureable magnitude, leaves no uncertainty, whether an extraordinary developement of the mysteries of Providence, toward our race, is at hand. The frequent sighs of despairing Greece, are wafted on the winds to the ears of the whole world—The dying groan of Poland may yet convulse every monarchy in Europe —The suppressed fires of France are burning in concealment, only to burst forth in a more desolating earthquake, which will shatter and engulphtheir present system. A survey of the other states of Europe, and the East, would furnish us with events in embryo, which, when fully matured, must rock the world, and long tell on the destiny of nations. Whether these matchless events shall be chiefly brought

forward to a concurrent point, by the quickened energies of existing instruments, or by the sudden operation of new causes, is not for human intellect to determine. But, however this may be, Providence seems to have confided to this generation, the work of many past ages. Every system, religious and social, must pass a fiery scrutiny; what is false in *that*, must be abandoned ; and what is wrong in *this*, must be removed. We are therefore, to gird ourselves for lofty achievements—to put on the mighty panoply, with which eloquence can arm us. For, with millions of our race, it is still a midnight hour—it is so morally and intellectually ;—and though on the face of these dark and slumbering waters, the spirit of light and improvement begins to move, and the quickening mandate to come forth, which shall communicate life and order ; yet that ignorance and despotism, which have covered the broad circle of ages, and reduced vast nations to the mere wreck of ancient empires, will only be dissipated by the vigorous action of enlightened mind. This agency must act chiefly, through powerful writing, and eloquent speaking. These have been the chosen media, through which Providence has generally poured the light of the wise, on the darkness of the ignorant.

The powerful pen and the eloquent tongue, which have held so lofty a place among the chosen agents of Providence, are still destined for high achievements. These were the instruments, even more than the sword of Washington, that broke from the neck of America, the yoke of despotism.—These are the instruments also, by which the liberty of this young empire is becoming a fire to consume every monarchy on the footstool. What media more appropriate than these, through which the electric spirit of mental and moral renovation shall pass from breast to breast, and from realm to realm ?

It was when Greece was the school of nations, that despotism on the thrones of Macedon and Persia, quailed before eloquence—It was when Rome was the mistress of the world, that the mighty usurper of all its rights, trembled at the single voice of Cicero—It was when Popery held its mighty sceptre over all Europe, that by the eloquence of an obscure monk, this vast system of a thousand years was made to quake to its centre. And who can doubt, whether by this same wonder-working instrument, the spirit of national renovation shall move on, to that high and perfect triumph, which Provi-

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dence avowedly meditates ? Nor let it be imagined, that the effect of this tremendous engine, will subside with the ebbing passions which the orator excited. It will not, like the meteor's glare, flash for a brief period across a startled world, and then quench itself forever in the ocean of the past ; but like the rising lights in the Heavens, it will shine with a steady, and augmenting lustre.

If then, the pen and tongue of eloquence are to breathe on every land, a disenchanting spirit—a spirit, that shall dash the system, and crumble the thrones of despotism—a spirit, that shall break the spell of Brama, and stop the car of Juggernaut—a spirit, that shall dissipate the delusions of Mohamed, and give to the winds of heaven, the trumpery of Catholicism—a spirit, that shall carry to the goaded nations of Europe, and to the bleeding millions of the East, the balm which the laws and institutions of this youthful empire can furnish ; if all this is to be effected by your inimitable art, with what quenchless ardor should it be cultivated ? If a wondrous Providence has so crowded the nineteenth century, with the elements of public happiness, that more may be accomplished for our race now, in one *age*, than in the dull round of past *centuries*, how overpowering the motives to brighten and multiply this amazing instrumentality !

May this highest endowment of the intellect never cease to reside among you. May many go out from this far-famed Hall, to speak like the voice of God, to the ear of tyranny, and of obdurate crime, in deep-toned thunder, muttering through the stormy cloud—to speak in the ear of sighing grief, gentle as the zephyrs that fan the vernal flowers—to plead the cause of the oppressed stranger, of the crying orphan, and of the weeping widow, in strains of Æolian sweetness. But above all, when a darkness deeper than midnight, settles down on the dying hour, to speak in tones that will fix our spirit-eyes on the bright and abiding objects in the world of substance—and when Eternity shall roll up its broad orb to reveal its long concealed terrors, to let in on our ears, from the heights of Calvary, melting as the lutes of Heaven, the voice of a dying Restorer.

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